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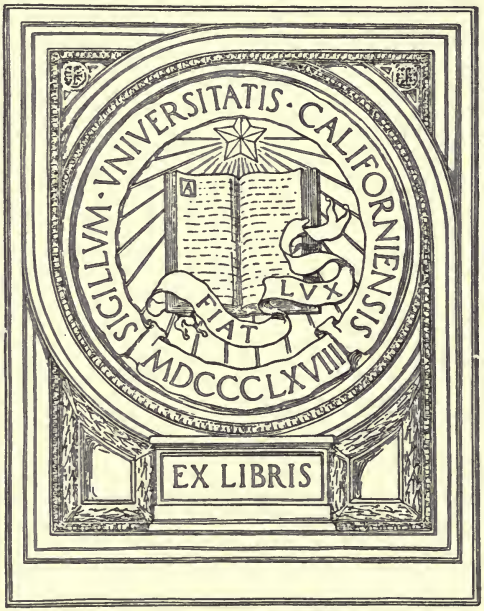
GIFT OF

Mr. Harold L. Leupp



LIBRARY
SCHOOL

Choosing Books

A LECTURE BY GEORGE ILES,

Hackley School, Tarrytown, N. Y., April 5, 1917.

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HACKLEY SCHOOL,
TARRYTOWN, N. Y.
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of H. L. Leupp.

Choosing Books.

A Lecture by George Iles to Hackley School, April 5,1917.

When first I went to school, a good many years ago, an older boy told me that "Robinson Crusoe" was the best book he had ever read. That winter he lent me the volume, and I felt sorely grieved when my father said that the work was mere fiction, that there had never been any real Crusoe or his man Friday. Soon afterward another schoolmate lent me Dana's "Two Years Before the Mast," but its truth did not stir me as did the marvellously invented chapters of Defoe. And so my reading went on month by month, year by year. As one of the youngest boys in our class, I listened to what other boys said about books really worth while. And thus, without planning it at all, I began to depend upon better informed folk than myself in choosing my books, and that practice became a habit useful to me ever since. To be sure, my first counsellors in the school-yard varied a good deal in knowledge and in soundness of judgment. I can remember a dozen paltry romances, imitated from Cooper, that swept through our school in a whirlwind of popularity, forerunning the Harkaway series of a later day. And yet, in the main, so sensible was the pilotage I enjoyed, that by the time I was fourteen or so I had read Scott's "Guy Mannering" and "Quentin Durward"; Hawthorne's "House of the Seven Gables"; Cooper's "Last of the Mohicans"; Dickens' "Oliver Twist" and "David Copperfield"; Thackeray's "Henry Esmond"; and that capital story of whaling adventure, "Moby Dick," by Herman Melville. Even in those distant days it was plain that boys find interest in the shelves of grown-up folk. Indeed many of the books written for boys, such as the Henty series, have a distinct flavor of milk and water, with a good deal more water than milk. Incomparably better are the novels of Scott and Cooper, Stevenson and Kipling, as keenly relished by manly boys as by men who continue to be boys as long as they live.

As the years of youth followed one another, my range in fiction grew constantly a little wider. Where an author, as Walter Scott, attracted me forcefully, I took up every book of his that I could lay my hands on. Then new acquaintances were added.

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"The Warden" of Anthony Trollope opened the door to his Barchester series, which I could now reread with pleasure. In due time I came to Alexandre Dumas and Victor Hugo. I hope this year to find time to take up once more "The Three Musketeers" and "The Toilers of the Sea." But after all novels are simply the dessert of literature, and my shelves began to show a few biographies and histories, three or four treatises of science, with a little travel and exploration by way of change and refreshment. In gathering these more solid books I drew upon the information and good sense of men who knew literature by study, by comparison, by tests in teaching, and in writing for the press. One of my advisers was a librarian of rare judgment and untiring good will. I recall him today with a grateful heart. His library would be deemed a small and poor collection in these times, but its contents were well chosen, and my old friend was a tactful adapter of books to readers. He was rewarded by seeing that when lads become familiar with the best writing they are impatient with any other. Nobody who moves in Fifth Avenue society cares to cultivate comrades on the Bowery or Fourteenth Street.

An early discovery in our little northern library astonished me. As a boy I had looked upon history and applied science with mingled awe and dislike. Books in those fields might do for lawyers and doctors, clergymen and bank cashiers, but for boys, no! I found, to my delight, that Macaulay and Parkman, Tyndall, Huxley and Bagehot were every whit as interesting as Hawthorne and Poe. And there was, besides, the feeling that truth is truth, while fiction is but its shadow. It was with quickened pulse that I read the lives of James Watt, of George Stephenson, and of Charles Goodyear. Long before I was twenty, the great inventors and discoverers were my heroes, and my heroes they have remained. When first I came under their spell my old friend, the librarian, remarked that I was reading nothing but invention and discovery. He did me a good service as he recommended "a balanced ration" in my books. I have never forgotten that counsel. In class-room at school or college, chemistry may follow upon history, and composition upon either Latin or algebra, by turns giving exercise and rest to widely different faculties of one's brain. There is like profit in keeping together on one's table John Burroughs and Francis Parkman, William James and John Muir. King David

never was wiser than when he exclaimed, "O sing unto the Lord a *new* song!" In maintaining a due diversity in one's reading it is well to consult a librarian of experience. He knows which are the best books in each department, and a tour of every alcove may discover in a young reader tastes for the drama, for bird-lore, or aught else, which until then lay dormant in his brain. A librarian, too, learns more than anybody else regarding the new books of merit which constantly teem from the press. He hears comments from the best read men and women in his town or city; he weighs and compares the leading reviews of books as they appear in such a journal as the New York *Nation*; and he is usually able to hand you the books he names, often with opportunities for comparing two or three with one another. A museum of natural history, a botanical garden, an aquarium, an art gallery, even a cotton-mill, takes on new meaning and fresh allurement when one has a thoroughly informed guide who wishes his visitors to share his knowledge and enthusiasm. What has taken him years to learn may be focussed into a single perambulation. So also when a good library has its treasures unfolded by a custodian of mark. He may display a gallery of Indian chiefs and medicine-men, such as those pictured by Mr. Edward S. Curtis. Or, he opens a superb collection of ballads, such as that of the late Professor Child of Harvard. Or he may show us a portfolio of wildflowers, aglow with every tint of summer; and there and then an interest is planted to yield harvests of cheer as long as we live. Indeed, in the field of literature, as in every other field of life, our success will largely turn upon our choice of guides and advisers. Every large modern business proceeds step by step as its chieftains, who may be engineers, mechanics, chemists, physicists, builders or salesmen, take full counsel with one another. In the high and thorny road of citizenship our duty is often pivoted upon the careful choice of leaders, whom we exchange for better leaders—if, happily, these are to be found.

When men distinguished for knowledge, ability, and wisdom are unanimous, we bow to their decisions. One such verdict is that the Bible and Shakespeare are so supreme in merit, have so profoundly colored human history, that they should be read by one's twenty-first birthday and studied as long as we live. With regard to these golden books there may be reluctance. Here it is well to take advantage of occasions. Suppose we see Shakes-

peare's "Henry VIII," what time more fitting to read that play, and then pass to a much greater work, "Henry IV"? Then may follow "Hamlet," "Macbeth," "Othello" and the other chief creations of our first dramatist. With respect to the Bible allow me to repeat what can never be said too often: it is incomparably the richest literary heritage of our race. In Isaiah, in the Psalms, in the Gospels, in the letters of Saint Paul, are the master tones of human eloquence. One cause of the primacy of English literature is the familiarity of English-speaking nations with their Scriptures. And how wide the gulf between the Bible itself and the best writing by its students! John Bunyan has given us our only allegory of human life. It holds but one parable, that of the man with the muckrake, worthy to be read on the same day with "The Ninety and Nine," "The Sower," and "The Prodigal Son." When you get a Bible take the trouble to find an edition which includes The Apochrypha. Its books, as remarkable as those of the Old Testament, have fallen into unmerited neglect. Ecclesiasticus and The Wisdom of Solomon are on the same high plane as the Book of Proverbs.

If interest in Shakespeare may be stimulated by witnessing one of his plays, interest in other books may be sown as we observe the anniversaries of history, year by year. Lincoln Day has incited many a young reader to take up a brief biography of the martyred President. For reference, the ten volumes by his secretaries, Hay and Nicolay, are indispensable. A single volume has been condensed from this series of ten books. Not only historical dates, but historical places, have their incitements for us. One of the glories of American literature is Washington Irving. Where may we read "The Sketchbook" with more zest than at Tarrytown, the home of Irving, and still the home of his kindred, two of whom have attended Hackley School? When the leaves, all too few, of "The Sketchbook" have been turned, "Bracebridge Hall" may come next, then "The Conquest of Granada," and, if time permits, the Life of the author himself, which includes his matchless letters, recounting his friendships with Walter Scott and other illustrious men. And in such eventful days as those through which we are now passing, biography and history receive new and striking additions every twenty-four hours. Often the recital of a great battle, such as that of the Marne; of such an overturn as that of the Russian autocracy, leads us into a book

alcove we had never entered before. Several leading public libraries spread on their bulletin boards the chief occurrences of each passing week, at home and abroad, naming such of their books, reports, and articles as cast light upon them. Thus value is conferred upon many a tome which otherwise would sleep in unbroken rest. Much of the best writing on the European war has appeared in magazines. None of this work is more worthy of study than the proposals by Dr. Charles W. Eliot and others, to assure a permanent peace when this conflict comes to an end. Only in a public library, amply equipped, thoroughly indexed and catalogued, may we follow this momentous discussion.

Librarians tell us that while the demand for biography and history is increasing, poetry is seldom asked for, despite the charm of modern verse, and its intimate reflection of modern life. One reason is that poetry is bought rather than borrowed from libraries, like fiction. Another reason is that, as a rule, poets write too much, and offer us their gems, as the stars in heaven, decidedly far apart. Here anthologies proffer us both chart and compass. At the outset of one's reading it is not feasible even if it were desirable, to know the great poets from lid to lid. The anthologies edited by Dana and by Bryant, though somewhat time-worn, are still worth having. Small and recent collections, which may tempt the timid beginner, have been brought together by Miss Jessie B. Rittenhouse, Professor Lounsbury, and Edmund Gosse. Comprehensive in its riches is the "Home Book of Verse" edited by Professor Burton E. Stevenson. In his pages are well chosen examples of Shakespeare and Milton, Wordsworth and Tennyson. There, too, are representative pages from Dryden, Pope, Cowper and other singers who might otherwise be mere names to us. And here are lyrics by Sir Phillip Sidney, Andrew Marvell, James Shirley, Blanco White, Henry David Thoreau, and many another chorister who rose into the upper sky but once or twice in a life-time. From such an ante-room he may pass at will to the full round of any poet who commands our personal allegiance, Keats or Poe, Browning or Emerson, let us say.

And now we may pass from poetry to a widely different sphere, that of earning our daily bread. Wide and varied indeed is the literature of the livelihoods. When a definite trade or profession is being prepared for, and is duly entered upon, its books must be wisely laid under contribution. Here one's choice is of

moment as never before, so that there should be an access of care in seeking advisers. An alumnus of this School is to plan chemical works as their engineer. Another has adopted the metallurgy of copper as his life-work. Agriculture has attracted a third pupil of Hackley School, and a fourth is now an expert in fuel economy. Their widely different books will be assembled in the light of counsel from their teachers, with many a recent title worth heeding from men in successful practice. And they will listen with both ears to what is said by the men just a step or two ahead of them, who stand nearest to them, and within arm's reach. A guide ceases to be of any use when he strides so far ahead as to be hidden by the curvature of the earth. Helpful books are supplemented by periodicals of like quality. Electrical engineers broaden and revise their information by the weekly advent of "The Electrical World." With equal gain iron-smelters and steelworkers turn the leaves of "The Iron Age," to keep abreast of the advances there set forth. All such journals review the current books in their special provinces, engaging competent and trustworthy critics for the task.

Reviews of this stamp form a golden resource in a great technical library, such as that of the Engineering Societies at 29 West 39th Street, New York. Here the librarian, Mr. W. P. Cutter, renders aid to engineers not only in America, but throughout the world. For a small fee he furnishes copies of chapters, articles, reports, plans and illustrations, in any requested department, as they appear. A huge camera turns out these copies in *fac simile*. Think what it means to a copper smelter in Arizona, a nickel miner in Northern Ontario, to have Mr. Cutter in a watch tower for his behoof. And aid just as important is springing up in another quarter. Among the leaders in American engineering are Stone & Webster of Boston, who build and operate waterworks, power-plants, and the like. This corporation has a large, carefully chosen library for its staff, with Mr. G. W. Lee as librarian. He is organizing "sponsors" to keep watch and ward regarding specific subjects, reinforced concrete, the uses of electric heat in metallurgy, and so on. These sponsors are to render service as counsellors to librarians, or in giving information to individual inquirers.

In a field remote from engineering, that of American history, the student has more rest and quiet than if his desk were in

Thirty-ninth Street. As Daniel Webster said, "the past at least is secure," and the yearly additions to our annals seldom modify our established traditions and our long accepted story of the birth and growth, and the rebirth, of our Union. Here, then, is a tract where the pilots are not liable to the supersedure constantly imminent in every zone of applied science. In 1902 the American Library Association, at my instance, issued "The Literature of American History," edited by the late Mr. J. N. Larned of Buffalo. Its 4100 titles were brought together by forty scholars, each a sound judge in his field, who gave every chosen book a brief note. The more important departments, those of colonial times and the Civil War, for example, are introduced by a page or two of general and most helpful survey. This guide closes with three lists: the first, very brief, is suitable for a school library; the second is somewhat longer; the third is still fuller, comprising about five hundred volumes, worthy to form a good working library. It was my hope that supplements might continue this work year by year. But the cost and toil of preparation forbade more than two issues. Let us expect that in due time the American Library Association will republish Mr. Larned's manual, brought down to date, to be followed by annual supplements of like range and merit. Then, with lessons of experience in mind, other fields of literature may be attacked, so that with the least possible delay the best available judgments on worth-while books may be placed at the service of every reader and student in America. If so bold a program gives us pause, minor departments of books may be adjudged as opportunities arise. Early in 1916 Professor Clarence B. Thompson of Harvard University, at my request, gave the American Library Association a short list of works on Scientific Management, with luminous notes. That list but adds to the homage paid by engineers the world over to the memory of the late Frederick Winslow Taylor. The authors convened by Professor Thompson are first and chiefly Mr. Taylor, and then his disciples.

Insofar as we are disciples of Mr. Taylor we will cultivate efficiency in reading as in all else that we do. But let us remember that Mr. Taylor, one of the wisest men who ever lived, added to the output of his workmen by giving them rest-periods ever and anon. I dare say that here he took a leaf out of school practice, and borrowed the "recesses" so popular at Tarrytown. It is well to be systematic in our choice and use of books. It is also well

to leave the highways of letters from time to time, and wander at will in their by-paths, seeking rest and refreshment. Before the present war your veteran traveler saw Edinburgh, or Florence, or Granada, so far as his guide-book instructed him. Then he closed his Murray and took a stroll along roads and lanes unmapped and alluring. Thus he came upon a forsaken shrine, or a workshop of mosaic, or he found a moss-grown sepulchre, not set down in his itinerary. Habitual readers have days when they shut their desks and haunt book stores, all the way from Mr. Putnam's sumptuous premises to the dingy dens of lower Fourth Avenue and Vesey Street. It was in Leary's famous bookery in Philadelphia that I first came upon Hudson's "Naturalist on the La Plata," the best book of its kind known to me. In the unlikeliest corners of New York and London, Paris and Madrid, I have found song-books and old plays worth their weight in platinum. One whole winter I sought in vain a picture of a smoke-jack turning a joint before a fire. Next May I went to Boston and, of course, to Cornhill, where my quest came to an end in a magazine grimy with years of neglect. Many another find awaits a pilgrim in the sixties as he trudges, heedless of bumps, through Ann Street and Fulton Street. There on a ten-cent tray is the very edition of Scott that he read as a boy, with its notes at the end of each volume. Beside it is the original form of Holmes' "Autocrat of the Breakfast Table," with its portraits of "the poor relation" and "the young man called John," never reproduced. And thus the Indian summer of life has joys all its own as one rereads old favorites and compares impressions fifty years apart. Thrice happy is he who early in life chooses a worthy theme which he can pursue in highways and byways as long as he lives. It may be the life of a national hero, as Lincoln; of a great inventor, as Edison; or it may be the story of his native town, Gibraltar, Boston, or Plymouth-of the-pilgrimage. Or he may be drawn to the unfolding panorama of photography in education, the advances in wireless telegraphy and telephony. Or, if he be modest, he may content himself with a study of that wonderful instrument, the gyroscope, which supplants the mariner's compass, and anon steadies a ship or an aeroplane in storm and tempest. As he diligently adds to his notes, clippings and books; as these are digested by faithful observation or experiment, he gradually rises to the judicial bench which so well served him in earlier days.

His delight now is, as well as he can, to hand the torch of knowledge to beginners who stand to-day where he stood forty or fifty years ago.

Whether we read as a duty, or for simple enjoyment, our choice will turn upon the careers before us, and upon the make of our individual minds. Students who take up law as their profession will read in alcoves far removed from those of Water Supply, or Yellow Fever Prophylaxis. In our scant leisure most of us would not be refreshed, but bored, by Montaigne, Browning, or George Meredith. Yet there are men and women who esteem these authors so highly that they commit their pages to memory, to enjoy their daily companionship. With wide diversities of human toil, of personal aptitudes and inabilities, are there any general rules worth offering you this morning?

Yes. But please consider them as open to amendment every day that you live and grow wiser. First of all it is well to know the supremely great books upon which trustworthy critics, generation after generation, have set their seals of approval. Beyond that small nucleus, sketched in a list I have brought to you today, stretch the thousands of books among which you must choose as carefully as you can. In literature it is safe to begin with only the famous books, preferring those which have come of age, whose pages command reperusal for years after they left their authors' desks. Many new books, treating themes of the day, or otherwise working a popular vein of sentiment or satire, are every year heralded with superlative praise. This praise does not impose upon veterans of the market-place. They know that it is too warm and too expensive to last long. A twelve-month hence the claque will be blistering its palms before some new eclipser of Tennyson and Lowell, Hawthorne and Holmes.

In science, let us read the latest books by competent men who have a first-hand familiarity with their themes. Fortunately, in our leading schools of medicine and chemistry, physics and engineering, the teachers year by year embody their instruction in manuals of authority, masterly in exposition. Out-of-date studies of the carbon compounds, or of electrical transmission, are worthless except to the small class of historians who trace the development of a science step by step. An epoch-making work, such as Darwin's "Origin of Species," should be read from cover to cover in preference to any book derived or abridged from its pages.

There is always much gold in the wallet of such an explorer as Darwin which slips through the clumsy fingers of compilers and commentators.

It is well from time to time to draw up a short list of books to be read, always in the light of the best counsel to be had. When such a list is adhered to, it will bring its possessor the joy of accomplishment every year that he lives. During a twelve-month he will survey, let us suppose, electrical progress in practice and theory. Or, he may read the life and writings of Benjamin Franklin, and understand the causes which led to the Revolution and to the foundation of this Republic. There is an impassable gulf between systematic reading of this kind, and desultory glancing at pages of all sorts. A hasty perusal of newspapers, a few minutes now and then over a magazine, a taking up of the shallow, ephemeral books forced upon one's notice day by day, builds no real knowledge, trains no genuine power of analysis or judgment. But a reader who steadily sticks to James Russell Lowell, let us say, through the evenings of a winter, has become intimate with a great wit, a convincing critic, and a true poet. Henceforth Lowell will stand among his friends and helpers. A handsome recompense this for firm adhesion to a simple and alluring purpose. Readers of this consecutive type are virtually explorers, although they do not suspect it, and they receive the explorer's reward. Stanley began every morning where he left off last night; he explored Central Africa. The postman begins today where he began yesterday—and renews acquaintance with Tompkins Square.

As the world grows older, as men and women learn more, the higher is heaped our wealth in printed pages. After we have chosen our books, how shall we read them with most profit? It is old and wise counsel that bids us read pencil in hand. When we meet with a term we do not understand, "habeas corpus," for instance, let us ascertain its meaning. How many of us know where the cave of Adullam was, or how the stars and stripes came into our national flag? To answer such queries we should have at hand a few sterling works of reference. First, an English dictionary, full enough to comprise foreign phrases in common use. Second, a gazeteer, with large, clear maps. Third, a classical dictionary. Next, the latest edition of Bartlett's Quotations, with concordances to the Bible and Shakespeare. Many a question sends

us to a foreign dictionary, an encyclopedia, or to "Who's Who in America." These should be faithfully consulted. In the course of years this habit of reference affords an amazing total of information, every item of it joined to a theme of vital interest. And interest, after all, is the main impulse and promise as we choose our books.

Fiction.

Blackmore, R. D. *Lorna Doone.*
Bolderwood, Rolf. *Robbery Under Arms.*
Bunyan, John. *Pilgrim's Progress.*
Cable, George W. *Doctor Sevier.*
Clemens, S. L. *Prince and Pauper. Tom Sawyer. Huckleberry Finn.*
Cooper, J. F. *Deerslayer. Last of the Mohicans. Pathfinder. Pioneers.*
Craik, Mrs. Dinah Maria. *John Halifax, Gentleman.*
Crawford, F. Marion. *Mr. Isaacs. Tale of a Lonely Parish. A Roman Singer.*
Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe.*
Dana, Richard H. *Two Years Before the Mast.*
Deming, Philander. *Adirondack Stories.*
Dickens, Charles. *David Copperfield.*
Eggleston, Edward. *Hoosier Schoolmaster.*
Eliot, George. *Silas Marner.*
Goldsmith, Oliver. *Vicar of Wakefield.*
Harris, Joel Chandler. *Uncle Remus and His Friends.*
Harte, Bret. *Luck of Roaring Camp.*
Hope, Anthony. *Prisoner of Zenda.*
Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *House of the Seven Gables.*
Holmes, O. W. *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table.*
Howells, W. D. *Silas Lapham. Hazard of New Fortunes.*
Irving, Washington. *Sketchbook. Bracebridge Hall. Wolfert's Roost.*
Kipling, Rudyard. *Kim.*
Melville, Herman. *Typee. Omoo. Moby Dick.*
Poe, Edgar Allan. *Tales.*
Russell, William Clark. *Wreck of the Grosvenor.*
Scott, Michael. *Tom Cringle's Log.*

Scott, Walter. *Quentin Durward. Ivanhoe. Heart of Midlothian.*
Stevenson, R. L. *Treasure Island. Kidnapped.*
Stockton, F. R. *The Lady or the Tiger* and other tales.
Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*
Thackeray, W. M. *Esmond.*
Wallace, Lewis. *Ben Hur.*

Biography.

Boswell, James. *Samuel Johnson.*
Hay, John, and Nicolay, John G. *Abraham Lincoln* (in one volume).
Franklin, Benjamin. *Autobiography,* edited by John Bigelow.
Lockhart, J. G. *Walter Scott.*
Miller, Hugh. *My Schools and Schoolmasters.*

Travel.

Darwin, Charles. *Journal of Researches on "The Beagle."*
Hudson, W. H. *Idle Days In Patagonia. The Naturalist on the La Plata.*

Essays.

Bacon, Sir Francis.
Emerson, R. W.
Lamb, Charles.
Lowell, James Russell.
Macaulay, Thomas B.

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